

Message Text

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ACTION DHA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19486

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF. LA TH
SUBJECT: RTG POLICY WITH REGARD TO REFUGEES

REF: BANGKOK 19375

SUMMARY: IN A MEETING WITH INTERIOR MINISTER SAMAK TODAY,
CHARGE HAD LENGTHY EXCHANGE ON DIRECTION OF THAI REFUGEE
POLICY AS WELL AS SPECIFIC CASES INVOLVING 69 REFUGEES NOW
HELD IN NONG KHAI AND RECENT BOAT INCIDENT IN SONGKHLA IN-
DICATING CHANGE IN POLICE POLICY THERE. END SUMMARY.

1. CHARGE DISCUSSED AT LENGTH WITH SAMAK TODAY OUR
SERIOUS CONCERN OVER DIRECTION OF RESTRICTIVE THAI POLICY
WITH REGARD TO REFUGEES AND THE IMPLICATION WHICH IT CARRIES FOR
FORCIBLE REPATRIATION WHICH WE OPPOSE. SAMAK INDICATED THAT
RTG MUST HAVE "RESTRICTIONS" IN ORDER NOT TO "ENCOURAGE"
THE INFLOW OF REFUGEES TO THAILAND. AT THE SAME TIME, HE
SAID RTG INTENDS TO MAINTAIN AN "OPEN DOOR" POLICY AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS RESTRICTIONS WOULD REMAIN FLEXIBLE.
ALSO SAMAK SAID RTG WOULD NOT EMBARK ON "FORCIBLE RE-
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PATRIATION".

3. AS EVIDENCE OF RTG'S FLEXIBILITY IN HANDLING REFUGEE
PROBLEM, SAMAK POINTED TO CASE OF 69 REFUGEES OUT OF LAOS
NOW STRANDED IN NONG KHAI. SAMAK SAID GOVERNOR HAD CALLEVB
MOPZMXRG RECOMMEND THAT THEY BE SENT BACK. HE TOLD GOVERNOR
TAT THIS WAS MATTER HICH WOULD HAVE TO BE APPROACHED

VERY CAREFULLY AND THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE DECISION IN BANGKOK. SAMAK SAID THAT RTG WAS FULLY AWARE OF SENSITIVITY OF THIS ISSUE AND WANTED NO SITUATION IN WHICH IT WOULD TURN OVER REFUGEES FOR LATER PUNISHMENT. CONSEQUENTLY, THE MATTER IS RECEIVING VERY CLOSE ATTENTION AND ANY DECISION WITH REGARD TO DISPOSITION OF THIS CASE WILL BE MADE BY THE CABINET.

4. CHARGE STRESSED OUR CONCERN THAT THESE PEOPLE NOT BE FORCIBLY REPATRIATED TO LAOS, POINTING OUT OBVIOUS HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS, DESPITE PROBLEMS WHICH THIS CASE CASES CASES RTG. SAMAK SAID THAT ON THAT SCORE HE WOULD ASSURE CHARGE THAT THERE WOULD BE NO "FORCIBLE REPATRIATION", AND THAT OUR VIEWS WOULD BE WEIGHED IN GOVERNMENT CONSIDERATION.

5. CHARGE ALSO BROUGHT UP SITUATION OF SONGKHLA REPORTED BY OUR CONSUL THERE (SEPTTEL). SAMAK AT FIRST INDICATED THERE WAS NO CHANGE IN THAI POLICY IN ACCEPTING BOAT CASES. WHEN PRESSED HE SAID IT POSSIBLE THAT BECAUSE RTG CONSIDERING ESTABLISHING NEW CAMP OUTSIDE OF SONGKHLA SOME BOATS MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIRECTED TO ANOTHER AREA. CHARGE HOWEVER STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF RTG CONTINUING ITS ACCEPTANCE OF THESE BOAT CASES, NOTING PARTICULARLY FACT THAT WE ARE ALREADY IN PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING PROGRAM. TO TAKE THE GREATEST PART. SAMAK SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD POINT CHARGE WAS MAKING AND THAT HE WOULD LOOK INTO SONGKHLA
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SITUATION TO INSURE THAT NO BOATS ARE IN FACT TURNED AWAY AND OUT TO SEA ALTHOUGH THEY MIGHT BE DIRECTED TO DIFFERENT HARBORS IN THAILAND IF SEAWORTHY.

6. IN SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSION OF CHARGE'S VISIT WITH PRESS SAMAK FOCUSED ON BOAT CASES AND USG PAROLE PROGRAM. HIS COMMENTS ARE BEING REPORTED SEPTTEL. IN PRESS COMMENTS, HE TOOK HARDER, MORE BODDASTIC PUBLIC LINE THAN IN DISCUSSION NOTED ABOVE.

7 COMMENT: SAMAK CLEARLY UNDERSTANDS BOTH OUR CONCERNS OVER GENERAL DIRECTION OF THAI POLICY AND THE INDIVIDUAL CASES CITED ABOVE. DESPITE GENERALLY CONSTRUCTIVE TONE OF HIS COMMENTS WITH REGARD TO 69 REFUGEES, HE WAS VERY CAREFUL NOT TO GIVE ANY COMMITMENT OR INDICATION AS TO WHAT THEIR EVENTUAL DISPOSITION WOULD BE. WE MUST ACCEPT THAT HIS DEFINITION OF "FORCIBLE REPATRIATION" MAY WELL BE MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE THAN WE WISH.

8. ON SONGKHLA, SAMAK SAID ESSENTIALLY ALL THE RIGHT THINGS BUT WE WILL TRY TO FOLLOW UP BOTH WITH UNHCR AND DURING BARNES' SCHEDULED VISIT TO AREA SEPT. 3.

9. AT THIS POINT, I BELIEVE IT BE IMPORTANT THAT THE
DEPARTMENT CONSIDER ALSO WEIGHING IN WITH REGARD TO THE
69 REFUGEES. WOULD RECOMMEND THAT OAKLEY OR OTHER SENIOR
DEPARTMENT OFFICER CONSIDER TELEPHONING THAI AMBASSADOR
EXPRESSING OUR CONCERN OVER THE CASE ON HUMANITARIAN
GROUNDS AND HOPE THAT GROUP WOULD BE ACCEPTED AS REFUGEES.
WE ARE FOLLOWING THIS CLOSELY HERE BUT STRESS THERE IS NO
ASSURANCE AS TO WHAT FINAL RTG DECISION WOULD BE.
O'DONOHUE

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